



TESTIMONY

OF

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BEFORE

THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ON

“Funding Lapse and Security Gaps: Assessing the Harmful Impacts of the DHS Shutdown on Americans”

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Washington, D.C.

Chairman Garbarino, Ranking Member Thompson, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on the impacts of a government shutdown on the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)'s operations and our ability to serve the American people. I am Gregg Phillips, Associate Administrator for the Office of Response and Recovery, and I look forward to our conversation.

Today, I come to you representing the men and women of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. FEMA, a component of DHS, is the nation's lead agency for disaster response and recovery, as well as consequence management after terrorist attacks and catastrophic events. FEMA provides critical funding, training, and preparedness support to communities across America, including security planning for major events like the FIFA World Cup and America 250. With the current funding lapse, FEMA's ability to support Americans before, during, and after natural and man-made disasters is at risk. This is especially concerning as the nation faces heightened national security concerns.

Currently, over 4,000 FEMA employees are going without pay, many for the third time in less than a year. Staff are under significant financial and emotional strain, trying to serve their communities with fewer resources and no pay.

In February, I testified before the House Committee on Appropriations to speak to the potential impacts of a shutdown. I acknowledged that the Disaster Relief Fund, which is the source of federal funding for disaster response and recovery operations, had sufficient balances to continue emergency response activities for the foreseeable future. However, a month later, the Disaster Relief Fund is rapidly depleting. The consequences of this shutdown are real, serious and unsustainable.

Because of this, FEMA is forced to prioritize only the most urgent, life-saving actions. All other activities are delayed or suspended. If the fund is depleted, FEMA will be unable to fund non-life-saving disaster recovery efforts. This includes the ability to reimburse states and local governments for ongoing disasters, assign non-life-saving missions to federal partners, and maintain field operations and surge staffing. Coordination of federal consequence management after catastrophic incidents, including terrorist attacks, may also be severely impacted.

In addition to this, a depleted Disaster Relief Fund will severely hinder paying staff or covering operational costs, effectively halting response to major disasters and security incidents. If the Disaster Relief Fund is depleted, 10,000 mission-essential FEMA employees and more than 1,000 deployed reservists will be ordered to stop working because funds will be unavailable for their salaries. This would severely impact FEMA's ability to respond to disasters.

Further, as I mentioned in my February testimony, we continue to see delays in deploying financial assistance to affected communities to support their recovery efforts. Public Assistance funding will not move forward for ongoing or legacy disasters. FEMA will only carry out Public Assistance activities for new or recent disasters requiring immediate emergency action to protect lives or prevent catastrophic damage.

This is not just rhetoric - these impacts will have dire rippling effects for thousands of Americans and communities across the United States. Disaster survivors waiting for assistance face uncertainty and hardship. Local officials trying to rebuild after a hurricane or flood cannot access federal support. FEMA staff, many of whom have served through multiple disasters, are now struggling to pay their bills and support their families while continuing to serve the public.

In addition to these major disruptions to disaster response and recovery, FEMA's lack of funding is having dire consequences on its national security mission. Earlier this month, an individual committed a targeted act of violence against Temple Israel, a synagogue in Michigan. This individual rammed his vehicle through the synagogue's doors and fired his weapon. Thankfully, no congregants were killed during this attack, but a security officer was injured. Temple Israel has twice been a recipient of FEMA's Nonprofit Security Grant Program award, receiving federal funding to bolster its security against exactly this type of attack. Temple Israel applied for additional funding in Fiscal Year 2025, but due to the shutdown, FEMA cannot process non-essential grant actions. Temple Israel—and many houses of worship like it across the country—are facing the threat of targeted violence and terrorism without the additional funding that FEMA should be providing to help them protect themselves.

Another key aspect of FEMA's national security mission is supporting consequence management and national security missions. This delay in funding is undermining our readiness for major incidents, including terrorism or large-scale disasters, by disrupting critical preparedness and response activities.

Additionally, almost all of FEMA's training courses have been postponed due to the shutdown, including critical anti-terrorism preparedness courses and many others. The importance of these training courses cannot be measured, and their absence will be felt nationwide. Every week, over 45,000 students, primarily local emergency managers, firefighters, and emergency medical technicians, are denied the opportunity to learn how to better protect their communities. This shutdown is putting American lives at risk, especially in a time of a heightened threat environment.

Despite the limited staff and resources during the lapse, FEMA continues to prepare for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, anticipated to be the most attended sporting event in history featuring 78 U.S.-based matches across 11 host cities over 38 days. The unprecedented scale of this event makes public safety a top priority for FEMA and the Department at large. In addition to the World Cup games, FEMA is also preparing to carry out its role in planning and consequence management activities as localities around the country host America 250 national events. The preparation and planning for these events requires an all-hands on deck approach to ensure safety and security is not interrupted.

Currently, all non-emergency recovery work is paused, including Public Assistance project formulation, long-term recovery efforts, planning, and administrative processing that does not address an imminent threat. Non-disaster-related activities are limited. Every day in this shutdown increases the probability that a catastrophic disaster will occur during a period of federal incapacity.

In summary, this DHS shutdown is imposing far-reaching and serious consequences for FEMA's operations and for the nation's ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. I urge Congress to immediately pass funding for the Department so we can carry out our duties and responsibilities of serving and protecting the American people.

Thank you for your support and opportunity to appear before you today, I look forward to your questions.